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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 006470

SIPDIS

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EMBASSY VATICAN MESSAGE NO. 219/01

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT

OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

REF: VATICAN 06036

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON FOR REASONS 1.5
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(A) AND (D).

1. (C) AMBASSADOR PAID COURTESY CALL ON THE PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOG, CARDINAL FRANCIS ARINZE. CARDINAL ARINZE IS ONE OF ONLY TWO BLACK AFRICANS IN THE ROMAN CURIA (REF). THE CARDINAL DISCUSSED THE COUNCIL'S COORDINATION OF DIALOG WITH ALL NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS. THE ONLY EXCEPTION IS DIALOG WITH THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, WHICH ALONG WITH NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS, IS CONDUCTED BY THE COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY. ARINZE FURTHER EXPLAINED THAT THE COUNCIL GREW OUT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL IN WHICH IT WAS DECIDED TO TRY TO COLLABORATE WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS BODIES TO FOSTER BETTER UNDERSTANDING BY EMPHASIZING WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON, AND HOW THEY CAN BETTER SERVE MANKIND JOINTLY.

2. (C) CARDINAL ARINZE'S BIGGEST ACCOUNT IS DIALOG WITH THE MUSLIMS. THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY, WITH 18% OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, IS THE SECOND LARGEST WORLD RELIGION AFTER CHRISTIANITY WHICH COMPOSES 33%. HE STATED THAT TWO AREAS IN WHICH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WISHES TO CHANGE CURRENT MUSLIM THINKING IS THAT OF 1) EDUCATION AND 2) RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. THE VATICAN IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SYSTEM WHICH PORTRAYS CHRISTIANS AS THE "ENEMY"; AND WITH THE LACK OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN MANY MUSLIM COUNTRIES.

3. (C) THE CARDINAL USED THE OCCASION TO AGAIN EXPRESS HIS CONDOLENCES FOR THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK. HE SAID IT WOULD BE A "DISASTER" IF THE CONCEPT OF HUNTINGTON'S "CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS" WERE TO BECOME A REALITY. HE
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WENT ON TO STATE, HOWEVER, THAT THE U.S. MUST REALIZE THAT IF THE PALESTINIAN/ISRAELI CONFLICT WERE SETTLED AND IF THE EMBARQO AGAINST IRAQ WERE LIFTED, MUCH OF THE AGENDA OF THE FUNDAMENTALISTS WOULD "EVAPORATE". THE AMBASSADOR EXPLAINED WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO KEEP THE EMBARQO ON SADDAM HUSSEIN'S REGIME. THE CARDINAL REPLIED THAT EVEN IF THE CASE HAS MERIT, THE IMAGES IN WHICH THE MUSLIM WORLD SEES ARE THOSE OF "DYING BABIES", DUE TO HARD-HEARTED, MEAN AMERICANS.

4. (C) CARDINAL ARINZE SPOKE BRIEFLY ABOUT HIS COUNCIL'S ROLE IN ORGANIZING THE JANUARY 24 INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE IN ASSISI. HE SAID THAT HE EXPECTED APPROXIMATELY 50 U.S. RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO BE INVITED. THE AMBASSADOR REQUESTED THAT HE SHARE THE INVITATION LIST WITH THE EMBASSY AS SOON AS IT IS FINALIZED.

5. (C) COMMENT: THE JANUARY 24 CONFERENCE, ALTHOUGH OSTENSIBLY A RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE, HAS THE POTENTIAL OF PRODUCING POLITICAL STATEMENTS. IT IS LIKELY THAT ONE SUCH STATEMENT WILL BE A CONDEMNATION OF THE EMBARQO IN IRAQ. POST WILL MONITOR DEVELOPMENTS LEADING TO THE CONFERENCE, AS WELL AS ATTEND IN AN OBSERVER CAPACITY. NICHOLSON

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